
This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

<http://books.google.com>



Some Thoughts
For Advent.





600100054G

SOME
THOUGHTS FOR ADVENT;
BEING
DAILY READINGS
FOR THE SEASON.

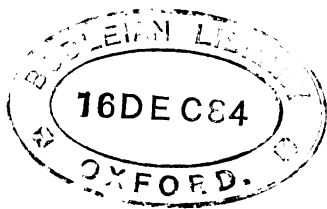
BY

THE AUTHOR OF "SOME THOUGHTS FOR HOLY WEEK,"
"THE GREAT ROCK AHEAD," &c.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE TRACT COMMITTEE.

LONDON:
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, CHARING CROSS, W.C.;
43, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, E.C.;
26, ST. GEORGE'S PLACE, HYDE PARK CORNER, S.W.
BRIGHTON: 135, NORTH STREET.
NEW YORK: E. & J. B. YOUNG & CO.

1405. f. 8
Digitized by Google



PREFACE.

IN preparing a series of Daily Thoughts for Advent, the writer's view has been, not to supplant any Book of Meditations which may be in use throughout the year, but simply to add something short and helpful, having distinct reference to the season. In these hurrying days of ours, one is apt to miss the golden opportunities which the Church's seasons offer for private reflections on particular subjects. Press of business or a multiplicity of engagements makes concentration of thought a difficult task.

It is in the hope of aiding this, in a very simple way, that the following chapters have been written, and the Author fervently hopes and prays that every reader will take them up with an honest purpose, and will so dwell upon each "Thought" during the hours of the day, that it may make a sensible impression for good upon his spiritual life, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

To this end the reading should be entered upon with an appeal to God for grace to read and reflect aright. There are many petitions in the Psalms suitable for such a purpose, among which are the following: "Lead me, O Lord, in Thy righteousness; make Thy way plain before my face." v. 8.

O Lord, "open Thou mine eyes: that I may see the wondrous things of Thy law." cxix. 18.

First Sunday in Advent.

“Each of the great Festivals of the Church is the centre of a sacred season, which begins with a period of solemn preparation, and ends with one of holy joy. Thus Christmas is preceded by the season of Advent, which was formerly observed in much the same way as Lent, though with less strictness, and is followed by the twelve days of festal joy which terminate with Epiphany.”—EVAN DANIEL.

TO-DAY we are at the beginning of another Christian year. We have been spared to see one round of the Church's seasons close, and another round unfold itself. Here, then, is a fresh starting-point in the spiritual life, a point at which it behoves every one to make a new effort so to run the race that he may win the prize, so to fight the battle that he may wear the fadeless crown.

What incentive could there be so capable of inducing men to make a new start in good earnest as the thought of the coming of Jesus Christ, their Saviour and their Judge? Surely none;

therefore it is that the Church, ever helpful as our guide and teacher, sets before us Christ's Advent to be the motive-power of our fresh, new effort in the conflict. While the year was growing old, we were, perhaps, becoming weary; and while we took our ease and slept, the enemy stole a march upon us. But now, with the New Year, we must rouse ourselves and brace on our heavenly armour. "It is high time to awake out of sleep," the sleep of dulness and deadness and fancied safety; for we have an urgent task—"to cast off the works of darkness," those evil things, be they deeds, or words, or thoughts, of which we shall be ashamed when the last Judgment lays them bare before God and His assembled hosts; and to "put on the armour of light," the armour of righteousness with which alone we can resist and overcome the Evil One.

This Advent season, then, must be made a time of serious preparation, first, for a worthy commemoration of Christ's first coming; and, secondly, for our actual meeting with Him at His final coming. There is no extraordinary preparation needed, nothing but what the simplest and

most unlettered can effect by God's good help; and yet, without this help, the greatest and most learned cannot effect it. For it requires nothing more and nothing less than this—the yielding of the whole heart to God, the willingness to be now and for ever the servant of “the King, Who cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Who will stand up this Advent Sunday, and say with humble but courageous heart, “Lord Jesus, I know that Thou didst come to Earth as a lowly Child, and I would prepare to honour Thee by devoutly celebrating Thy birth. I know that Thou wilt come again in power, and I would prepare to welcome Thee with songs of gladness?”

Who will thus declare himself on the Lord's side, who? Oh! surely it would be no presumption if I, a mere child in spiritual growth, were to offer myself for this service. It is already laid upon me; for, in my baptism, I was made Christ's soldier and servant. It is, therefore, my part individually to prepare the way for Him.

Through the past week we daily prayed to God to stir up the wills of His faithful people. Oh! that mine may be so effectually stirred up, that by His grace I may make a right and profitable use of this Advent season. Every day during these solemn weeks I will snatch a few minutes away from the world and its allurements, away from the very thoughts which distract, and will meditate quietly upon the Eternal Son of God. He came down from Heaven to save me. He will come again to judge me. He came to offer me salvation. He will return to see if I be ready finally to accept it.

Ready? ah! shall I not make ready? Whatever betide me, shall not *this* be my chief aim in life, to be prepared to meet my Lord? "Watch and pray," this shall be my Advent motto. For, "blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching¹."

"Christian, seek not yet repose,
Hear thy guardian angel say,
Thou art in the midst of foes,
 'Watch and pray.'

¹ St. Luke xii. 37.

Gird thy heavenly armour on,
Wear it ever night and day,
Ambushed lies the evil one,
 'Watch and pray.'

Watch, as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day,
Pray, that help may be sent down,
 'Watch and pray.'"

CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT.

Monday after the First Sunday.

“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth).”—*St. John* i. 14.

THE Collect for this week is to be used daily till Christmas Eve; it is thus the Collect of the whole season, essentially *the Advent Collect*. This short form sets forth some of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, while it sums up, in a few words, the teachings and duties of this sacred season.

We notice, in this prayer, four distinct contrasts; *darkness* and *light* are set one against the other; our Lord's *first* coming “in *great humility*,” and His second coming in “His *glorious Majesty*,” the *now* of this *mortal life* and the *Life Immortal* of the Future. Doubtless there is a design in these striking transitions; they must have been intended to startle the soul and fill it with awe at the greatness of the events brought before it at this particular time.

To-day we will dwell, for a few minutes, upon the marvellous condescension of the Son of God, Himself eternal and almighty, in taking upon Him our human nature. Oh! the love that must have filled the mind of the Deity, Who for the sake of a sinful, perishing world could divest Himself of His glory, and become a frail human Babe, subject to all the trials to which the human race is prone.

We should wonder at an earthly prince, who could conceive a desire to go alone into a distant portion of his father's dominions, which was in open rebellion, and make himself one of the people, in order by self-sacrifice to bring about a reconciliation, and by a righteous example to restore the subjects to allegiance. We should have nothing but praise for such a man, who would become a very hero by reason of his courage, condescension, and charity.

But what would this be compared with the self-devotion of our Lord? The great "I AM," self-existent before all worlds, the Second Person of the Eternal Three, before whom the Seraphim cover their faces when they sing their hymns of

ceaseless adoration¹; the only-begotten Son of an all-wise, all-loving Father—that *He* should have quitted the glory which He had enjoyed from everlasting, have left the bosom of His Father², and come into a world of sin and misery and degradation, this is a very marvel of condescension.

“He came to visit us in great humility—*us*, the rebellious subjects of an all-wise, all-holy Sovereign; *in humility*, not with His attribute of power, not to judge, condemn and punish, not to reduce by force to obedience³; no, He came unarmed, in the helpless condition of an infant, the Child of a lowly mother, to grow up among the ignorant and obstinate people, who had spurned His Father’s rule, to set them an example of purity and holiness, and to pay with His own life the debt which not one of them, not all of them together, could possibly have cancelled.

And how did the undone world receive Him? With open arms? with humble gratitude? Alas! when “He came unto His own, His own received Him not.” They rebelled against the Son, as they

¹ Isaiah vi. 1-3. ² See S. John i. 18. ³ S. John iii. 16, 17.

had rebelled against the Father. The world was shrouded in darkness, and cared not for the light; it was immersed in sin, and the presence of the Holy One was an unwelcome presence.

But we need not pursue this subject any further to-day. The unbelief and hardness of the people who lived in the time of our Lord's earthly life may form a theme for another meditation. At the present moment I would rather think upon my own case, and ask myself: Have I ever sufficiently endeavoured to realize the immensity of the Sacrifice which God the Son made for me, His sinful creature? His sacrifice, I mean, in taking upon Him our flesh, for *this* is not the season for *emphasizing* the Sacrifice of Calvary, though the thought of it can never be out of place. It is the great condescension of the Lord, of *my* Lord, in His incarnation, which I ought now to endeavour to realize.

Realize it I never can in this life, for it is infinitely past my comprehension; but I can strive to be rising ever nearer and nearer to its realization; and this shall be my aim during the four short weeks of Advent. For, the more I value

the humility and love involved in Christ's Incarnation, the more closely will my spirit be knit with His. The Festival of the Nativity will become to me a feast of heavenly joy; and I shall love to use it, not so much for worldly pleasures, however innocent, as for the express honour of Him, Who left the glory which He had with the Father, and taking upon Him the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of men ¹.

It has been well said that in the Passion and Crucifixion was shewn the humility of a man, in the Incarnation and Nativity the humiliation of God. In truth it is a wondrous theme. I can but bow in lowly adoration before the God-man Jesus, and exclaim, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief!"

"Saviour, full of truth and grace,
Leaving Thine eternal place,
To restore our fallen race,
Hear us, holy Jesu !

Only hope of those who pray,
Only help while here we stay,
Life of those who pass away,
Here us, holy Jesu !"

¹ See Phil. ii. 6, 7.

Tuesday after the First Sunday.

"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple."—*Malachi* iii. 1.

IN the Gospel for last Sunday there is laid before us the account of our Lord's entering into Jerusalem, and cleansing the Temple. The event is *commemorated* on Palm Sunday: but *this week* it is introduced in our service as prophetic of the Second Coming of Christ, when He will purify His Church, and gather out of it all things that offend.

The Lord, Who had come to earth on a mission of love, rode one day "in lowly pomp" into His own royal city, compelling the inhabitants by His fulfilment of their ancient prophecies to acknowledge Him. Then Jesus entered into the Temple, and there most shameful acts of desecration met His eye. That beautiful house of

God had been built by the returned captives of Babylon, and solemnly dedicated to the worship of Jehovah more than 500 years before the coming of Christ¹. Yet now, when "the Messenger of the Covenant²" came, He found it a scene of merchandise, "a den of thieves."

And what could He do but chastise the desecrators? This, it is true, was not His reign of power and terror; but could He leave His Father's honour unvindicated? It had been written of Him prophetically: "The zeal of Thine house hath even eaten Me³." The power of Godhead was within Him, and now, if ever, it must be manifested.

This act of authority and retribution is but a faint foreshadowing of the final coming of the Judge in His judicial power and pomp. The same Jesus, Who rode into Jerusalem on an ass and cleansed the Temple of those who defamed it, will come in great triumph to His church on earth, when earthly things shall have had their day, and then will He drive out to everlasting destruction all who have spurned His salvation.

¹ See Ezra v. vi.

² Mal. iii. i.

³ Ps. lxxix. 9.

Ah! "who may abide the day of His coming¹?" That day "shall burn as an oven . . . and all that do wickedly shall become stubble²."

"All that do wickedly!" Can we look round at the nations of the world and see crime prevailing everywhere, can we glance over the cities and highways of our own land, and not tremble to think of the coming of the Judge? Well may we cry, in the words of Ezra, who mourned for the wickedness of his people: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens³." But the Lord from His seat above looks down even now in pity on His people. Though we are as bondsmen, in slavery to sin, our God "hath extended mercy unto us . . . to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof⁴." Therefore now, before the day of grace be past, we will pray for all "who profess and call themselves Christians," that they "may cast off the works of darkness" and walk "as children of the

¹ Mal. iii. 2.² iv. 1.³ Ezra ix. 6.⁴ ix. 9.

Light." It would be a cold and heartless thing to stand by and see our fellow-creatures sunk in wretchedness, and stretch forth no hand to lift them up. Shall we not rather search and find out what means we can, each one, employ for bettering their condition?

O God, my God, I entreat Thee for all who are living in sin, that they may be brought to see their danger and to turn to Thee. And for ourselves, who have been taught to fear Thy Name, oh ! grant us a holy zeal, that we may bear the wanderers in our hearts, and strive to reclaim them. So may they, as well as we, be ready by Thy grace to meet the Lord, when He comes again "to visit His temple."

Wednesday after the First Sunday.

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well.”—*Isaiah* i. 16.

YESTERDAY we considered the state of those who openly profaned God's holy temple; to-day we have to think upon such as profess sanctity while their hearts are unclean.

In the first lesson for last Sunday we heard the solemn warning of the Almighty, by the mouth of His Prophet Isaiah, to those who, with minds set on their own corrupt ways, yet dared to offer Him sacrifices and costly offerings. “To what purpose, He asked, did they enter into His courts, since their hearts were far from Him? The service of the lips, however solemn in outward form, was an abomination to Him, for God is a God of truth; and they that worship Him must worship Him in truth.

“When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide

Mine eyes from you ; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." Such was the message of the All-holy One to His rebellious children, the ancient people of the Jews ; for, so long as their worship was unreal and hypocritical, He could not accept it consistently with His purity and justice. But now let us mark how, at the very time of His just displeasure, the Father's yearning for His disobedient sons broke forth in an earnest charge to them to repent. "Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes ; cease to do evil, learn to do well." And then He condescended to reason with them. He drew them, (let us say it reverently,) into a conference with Himself, which might end, if they willed it so, in their complete restoration to His favour. If they would but turn to Him with all their hearts, the deep crimson dye of their sins should be washed out, and be no more remembered against them, but if they remained impenitent, there would be nothing for them but misery and destruction¹.

The Almighty would assuredly be avenged of

¹ See Isaiah i. 18-24.

His enemies; and yet (and here came a note of mercy and long-suffering) while casting out those that offended, He would spare the Faithful, so that Zion should yet be called "the City of Righteousness," being redeemed with judgment¹.

Here was a Divine utterance, prophetic of the Advent of Christ, to be the Deliverer of His people. But, even after this word of hope, there came again the oft-repeated warning—"The destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed²." There was no evading this sentence, for the Lord Himself had pronounced it as the irrevocable decree for the people of all ages and all places.

What, then, is to be the lesson for ourselves from this remarkable chapter? It would seem to be chiefly this: that, if we would serve our God acceptably, we must serve Him with honest and true hearts. In the apocryphal Book of Wisdom it is written: "They that keep holiness holily shall be judged holy³;" and, on the other hand, good works done from impure motives

¹ Isaiah i. 25-27.

² i. 28.

³ Wisdom vi. 10.

will never be accounted good by the Searcher of hearts. There must be the upright intention proceeding from singleness of heart, or the (apparently) loftiest deed will be an abomination in God's sight.

Who is there among us that can satisfy such requirements? For myself, I must confess that many a time I have done some good, kind deed with very unworthy motives. Selfishness has, perhaps, been lurking in the background, when I have befriended some poor sufferer; and I have accepted thanks and praise without one blush of shame. Ah! how often, too, have I done a good deed of my own free will, which I would not have consented to do at another's prompting. Is there no self-seeking in conduct such as this? Silver given in this spirit becomes dross to the donor, even if it be wealth to the receiver.

Let me think over this matter seriously, and enquire if there be no hypocrisy, no self-deception in my course of life. Let me, on bended knees, search into my heart to discover if there be any discrepancy between my outward conduct and my inward motives. My Father Himself is

graciously reasoning with me, and bidding me, by the voice of His prophets, to wash me in the precious Blood, and wholly turn to Him.

O God! Who "requirest truth in the inward parts," "*Thou* shalt purge me, and I shall be clean: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow¹."

¹ See Psalm li. 6, 7.

Thursday after the First Sunday.

“When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you.”—*Isaiah* i. 15.

YESTERDAY we touched too briefly upon the subject of unreality in worship, as alluded to in the first chapter of *Isaiah*. We will return to it to-day.

The Prophet lived and preached and wrote between seven and eight hundred years before the coming of the Messiah. By his title, “The Evangelical Prophet,” we know that it was his special mission to prepare the way, albeit so long beforehand, for the Advent of Christ.

The Jews were in a state of miserable degradation from their vices; sin and wickedness abounded everywhere; yet, for all their corrupt living, they maintained the worship of the One God. They offered sacrifices unto Him, their incense rose up in clouds from the golden censer;

they observed their religious Festivals, the New Moons and the Sabbaths.

But to what purpose was all this hypocritical worship? It could never serve to the glory of the God of Truth; nay, it was but an insult to His majesty and holiness. All these things, He declared, were a trouble to Him, He could not endure them, He was weary to bear them. "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood¹."

What was to be done then to improve the condition of God's favoured, but degraded people? Were they to cease from their solemn assemblies because these in no way accorded with their daily life? In our own day people are apt to reason after this sort, and to say that their worldly occupations unfit them for the worship of God's House; that they are not good enough to join the devout congregation, and least of all are they fit to kneel before the holy altar, and offer up their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

¹ See Isaiah i. 13-15.

But this is not the manner in which the Lord reasoned with His sinful people. He bade them cease from their evil ways and learn to do well, promising a rich reward to willing obedience¹. This, then, is our wisdom at all times, not to bring down our religion to the level of our secular life, but to raise our whole tone into conformity with a sincere and regular worship of our God. Let our daily life with its variations of work and pleasure be one perpetual service to our Maker, and then it will be ever in harmony with the special worship which we offer in the courts of His house. Oh! this is a state to be aimed at with a stedfast eye, for it will bring peace and joy into the dullest career.

But there is another class of Christians whom the warning of the Prophet touches. He speaks to those who are regular church-goers (to use a common expression), those who are seldom absent from the services, and who are frequently to be seen at Holy Communion, who like a highly decorated building, an elaborate ritual, and exquisite music; and who concern themselves

¹ Isaiah i. 19.

with every step in the way of progress. Highly commendable is such conduct to all outward appearance; the only question is whether or not there be sincerity in their external service, for, if not, it is but a caricature of true worship. They must hearken to the voice of the Lord as He whispers to their consciences, "When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts¹? Do you come to My house of prayer and interest yourselves in matters concerning the Church that you may honour Me; or that you may propitiate a friend or superior, or may conform to the usages of the day, or please and gratify self?"

Let every one strive to give a true reply to this question, and see that, whatever may have been his case in the past, he gives to God in future that worship which alone is acceptable, the worship which proceeds from a pure and undivided heart.

One word, in conclusion, about myself. If I have gone week by week or day by day to church, have I not too often offered to God the

¹ Isaiah i. 12.

service of the lips while my thoughts have been on worldly affairs? Our great poet was but expressing a Bible truth when he wrote: "Words without thoughts never to heaven go¹."

Whither, then, have *my* words gone when, amid the costly and beautiful surroundings of the house of prayer, I have made the responses and sung the hymns and joined in the Eucharistic service with a feeling of satisfaction at the grandeur of the worship in which I was playing my part? Oh! how distasteful to the High and Holy One is the lip-service of the seemingly most reverent worshipper, whose outward seeming belies his inward feelings!

My Father, if I have ever offered Thee a worthless service, I pray Thee to forgive it for Thy dear Son's sake. And give me grace that, in the time to come, I may enter into Thy gates with thanksgiving, and into Thy courts with heart-felt praise.

¹ Hamlet.

Friday after the First Sunday.

“Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Isaiah ii. 5.

IN the second chapter of his prophecies, Isaiah gives a brilliant description of the glory of Jerusalem in the last days. For, it is to the setting up of His kingdom at Jerusalem, the city built on seven hills, that the second verse refers; and unto it, he says, “all nations shall flow.” Thus, “the last days” in this passage signify the times of the Messiah; that period of the world’s history to which all generations had been looking forward since the first prophetic utterance had announced a Saviour to wipe out the curse of the Fall¹.

There is a remarkable resemblance between the above passage in Isaiah and one in the fourth chapter of Micah; indeed, through several verses they run almost word for word. Knowing

¹ See Gen. iii. 15.

how highly the Jewish people venerated their chief city, and the temple which was its prime glory, the prophets shrank not from telling them that there was a higher exaltation for Jerusalem than any that she had yet enjoyed, "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills¹;" and not only so, but it should become a centre to which all the peoples of the earth should resort, that they might learn the ways of the Lord God, and walk in His paths².

These prophecies were made, of course, by the direct inspiration of God; indeed, it is told us of Isaiah, that he "*saw*" this word of prophecy, as though there had been vouchsafed to him a strong, clear vision of the things which were to come to pass in the last days. Like S. John the Divine³, he foresaw by an unmistakable revelation "the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, and blending with the earthly Jerusalem, so that the glory of the heavenly was communicated to the earthly⁴."

¹ Isaiah ii. 2, compare Micah iv. 1.

² See Isaiah ii. 3, and Micah iv. 2.

³ Rev. xxi. 2.

⁴ Readings on the First Lessons, by the Rev. Peter Young.

There must have been something especially comforting in these prophecies of Isaiah and Micah, following closely, as they did, upon their stern denunciations of the vices of the chosen nation. The princes and the magistrates, the priests and the common people had all been rebuked; but now for all alike there was a hope of recovery from degradation, a promise that their own holy, but polluted city should once again be exalted, and, more than this, should become a refuge for all peoples from every quarter of the globe; for that *the word of the Lord should itself go forth from Jerusalem*. And did not these things come to pass when the Child Jesus was presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh; and when, being lifted up on the summit of Calvary, He drew all men after Him; and again when He sent out His Apostles to preach His gospel, beginning at Jerusalem, and going forth to the ends of the Earth¹?

The time when Messiah should come was moreover to be a time of universal peace; and here was another encouraging prospect for those who

¹ See S. Luke xxiv. 26-49.

had been distracted by wars and tumults. God Himself would "judge among the nations" and rebuke many people, so that, influenced by the new law of "love," they should learn to dwell at peace with one another. And then, as if yearning over the souls of the rebellious people, the Prophet breaks forth in an exhortation to them to prepare for the events which He had foretold— "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord¹." For them the coming of the Messiah would be to no purpose unless they put off the deeds of darkness, and walked in the light of truth. Like an affectionate pastor, he classed himself with his flock, saying "Let *us* walk." He, too, was but a man, laden with infirmities; but the Spirit of the Lord being with him, he desired to lead them along the paths of righteousness, so that, when the promised Christ should come, they might be ready to receive Him.

And what of *us* who are privileged to live in these days which the old prophets desired to see, and yet could behold only in a vision? Do we

¹ Isaiah ii. 5.

value our privileges? are we striving to walk in the light of the Lord? His light is shining all around; aye, it penetrates into our very souls. But do we allow it full play, or are we of those who love darkness rather than light because our deeds are evil?

Let me think of myself individually. Do I value my place in the Church of Christ? do I love the Church for His sake, and prize her ordinances? do I frequent her services and thankfully receive her Sacraments? or do I, on the other hand, care mainly for my worldly advantages, and leave the spiritual life to take its chance? Alas! I surely think too little of my Christian privileges; too little do I value my heritage in the Church of the living God. But I will rouse me and bestir myself this Advent season, and say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths¹." And, oh! that I may learn so to rejoice in His Holy worship as to make the words of our beautiful hymn my own:

¹ Isaiah ii. 3.

“ We love the place, O God,
Wherein Thine honour dwells;
The joy of Thine abode
All earthly joy excels.

* * * * *

We love to sing below,
For mercies freely given;
But, oh! we long to know
The triumph-song of heaven.”

Saturday after the First Sunday.

“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body.”—*Col.* iii. 15.

YESTERDAY we considered the prophecies concerning the wondrous exaltation of Jerusalem by reason of the coming of the Messiah; and we touched upon the announcement of a period of peace and quietness which was to come in with the Gospel dispensation. To the Jews this must have been a sweet and most welcome prophecy issuing from the lips of Isaiah and Micah, and in language rich with Eastern imagery. There had been a long term of wars and commotions, as we know from the words of Joel¹, written in the preceding century, “Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let

¹ Joel iii. 9, 10.

the weak say, I am strong." But in the days of the Messiah the reverse of all this would come to pass; swords would be beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruninghooks; for instead of fighting on the battle-field, and warring one against another, they should sit every man "under his vine and under his fig tree¹" in a state of calm security.

Can any one conceive a more poetical description of the blessings of the Gospel? The literal fulfilment of this prophecy was seen in the universal peace which reigned over the world at the time of the Saviour's birth. In its spiritual significance it refers, first, to the inward peace which fills the heart of the true Christian; secondly, to the unity and concord which prevail among men so far as they accept the Gospel call, ruling themselves by its spirit; and, lastly, to the absolute unity which shall bind together all the servants of God under their Great Head, when at length "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ²."

¹ Micah iv. 4.

² Rev. xi. 15.

But immediately following this prophecy, and connected with it, is an earnest exhortation to the people to forsake their idols. "Enter into the rock," says Isaiah, "and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His Majesty¹. And Micah, with a holy boldness, declares—"All people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever²."

With a transition not unusual in Holy Scripture, these prophets carry their thoughts from the first to the second Advent of Christ without a break; making the one subject glide unto the other, or rather so intermingling the two that, in some passages, the same imagery serves for both. The remaining portions of the two chapters, upon which we have been meditating, bear reference to the coming of the Judge at the Last Day.

Here, then, I may pause, and endeavour personally to derive some benefit from this meditation. We, who live in the days of the Gospel Covenant, and under the rule of the

¹ Isaiah ii. 10.

² Micah iv. 5.

Prince of Peace, may use the Psalmist's words with even deeper meaning than he could have intended for them. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage¹." But do we derive all the advantage that is held out to us from our circumstances? "How lovely are the messengers," we read, "that preach us the gospel of peace." *Peace*, we have said, is the result of the Saviour's advent to all who, accepting his Gospel, strive to rule themselves by its spirit.

Have *I* that peace? Do I strive as much as lieth in me to live peaceably with all men? and do I cultivate that calm trust which belongs to those only who are ever waiting upon God? It will matter little to me that there be disturbance and strife around if, governed by the Prince of Peace, and filled with His Spirit, I may but possess that peace "which passeth understanding."

Oh! fill me with Thy Spirit, Lord,
Let all my life be Thine;
So shall Thy love possess my soul,
And Thy sweet peace be mine.

¹ Ps. xvi. 6. B. V.

Second Sunday in Advent.

"I do not believe that a satisfying knowledge of God often comes to the soul through the intellect. . . The Spirit itself must speak to the spirit before that knowledge of God, which is life and joy and power, can come to us."—ANNIE KEARY.

ON this second Sunday in Advent the Church directs our attention to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Last Sunday we heard of God's coming to us in the Person of the Man Christ Jesus. To-day we hear of His coming through the medium of His written Word. And we will endeavour through this week to fix our minds so intently upon the subject, as to deepen our value of the Bible, and to quicken our interest in its every page.

In the early days of the world's history the Almighty spoke occasionally in an open vision to His servants; as, for instance, to Adam and Eve and Cain in terrible rebuke, to Noah and Abraham in love and approbation. But the

time came when, for His chosen people, the Jews, God caused His law to be written down and His will to be made known by the pen of inspiration. Looking back through all the ages which have passed since the first of God's own books was penned, we wonder what must have been the feelings of the people to whom it was then handed. The One Eternal God of the universe speaking to His frail creatures, revealing to them something of His purposes, and directing them by His counsels, surely it was a condescension before which all must bow. The works of the Divine Author, as they came out one after another, must not be carelessly laid aside, but must be guarded and faithfully handed down to posterity. And thus we find that the sacred scrolls (for scrolls of parchment were used in those days in place of our modern books were kept with jealous care by the Jewish Rabbis, who read and expounded them to the people.

To their constant preservation of the Sacred writings we are indebted for our possession of the *Old Testament*, without which the *New*

would lose half its value and significance¹. Then, when God came in human person to visit our race, Gentiles as well as Jews were taken into covenant, the heathen came into Christ's inheritance, the utmost parts of the earth were to become in due time His possession². The record of the Saviour's life and death, and the intimation of His will concerning His Church, were then written by the same Divine Author, through the penmanship of several holy men selected and inspired for the task, and were committed to the keeping and guardianship of Christ's Church. And thus we Christians are possessors of the entire Bible, the two-fold witness, the Old and the New Testaments.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God³," therefore it is well called *Bible*, that is *The Book*. The one Supreme Book which, if received with a living faith, can, alone and unaided, bear the soul along its perilous course, fitting it for the trials of this life, and for its

¹ There is a trite remark: "The New Testament lies hid in the Old; the Old Testament is unfolded in the New." See S. P. C. K. Commentary on 2 Tim. iii. 15.

² See Ps. ii. 8.

³ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

eternal inheritance in the heavens¹. But do we value this priceless treasure as we ought? Value it at one-millionth part of its true worth we cannot, for it is past all human estimate, far above all possibility of human calculation. Yet we may have such an appreciation of the Holy Scriptures as shall win a gracious smile from the Divine Author; we may love the Bible and revere it. If at first we cannot own to *loving* it, we may attain to this end by a constant and prayerful study of it. We must first *believe* that it is in very truth the Word of God, and "profitable," then we shall open its pages with reverent spirit and an earnest desire to be instructed in the way of life; or, as we may say, to sit at the Feet of One Whose ways are unerring, Whose wisdom is infinite, and Who is Himself the Truth.

For myself I feel that I have never sufficiently prized the possession of a Bible. Perhaps the ease with which copies are acquired in these days of rapid printing has helped us to depreciate them. But let me carry my thoughts back some

¹ See S. James i. 21.

five hundred years, to the period before our great reformer Wyclif had made the first English translation of the entire Bible. How precious should I have deemed the gift if I had lived in those days! For of what use to ordinary readers was a book, which could only be read in a language which they could not understand?

I will strive to be more grateful in the future for the possession of a *Bible*, an *English Bible*, a *printed English Bible*. I will seek to gain something of the spirit of the Royal Psalmist, who cried—"O how sweet are Thy words unto my throat: yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth¹!" and "The righteousness of Thy testimonies is everlasting: O grant me understanding, and I shall live²."

¹ Psalm cxix. 103.

² cxix. 144.

Monday after the Second Sunday.

“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”—2 *S. Peter* i. 21.

THE inspiration of Holy Scripture is a matter of vital importance to us all; because it is on the Bible that our entire faith is grounded; on it rests our hope of Eternal Life. Once find the Bible false, and the Christian is undone.

But the question of its verity is not a question for me. I am already “grounded and settled” in the faith¹. All that I want is to acquire an ever growing appreciation of the Holy Book, and to be ready, though ever so feebly, to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in me². Now it is plain that the word *inspiration* has grown into having two distinct uses, which are, nevertheless, too often confused in men's minds. Some who admit that the Bible is inspired, admit it only in the sense

¹ See Col. i. 23.

² See 1 *S. Peter* iii. 15.

in which they would claim inspiration for the words of any brilliant author, or painter, or musician.

But this is a degradation of the Word of God. For the words of ordinary individuals, however gifted, are liable to mistakes and imperfections; but the one Book, whose Author is the God of Truth, the Omniscient, the All-wise, this one Book can lay claim to absolute truth and wisdom. The saintly men who penned it from time to time spake or wrote "as they were moved" or, more correctly, *borne along* by the Holy Ghost. To these "holy men of God," as S. Peter calls them, were committed the messages which the Lord of heaven and earth desired to send to His fallen creatures. And the Scripture thus given is profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works¹."

But there is a question on this particular point which it behoves each one to ask of himself. Do I, not only with my mind but with my heart,

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

believe the Bible to be the unalloyed word of God? If I do, then I shall assuredly take it for my guide; I shall see that it be profitable to *me*, for profitable it can never be unless by my own consent. It is possible to possess a priceless treasure, and yet obtain no advantage from it. The Scripture is given "that the man of God may be perfect" (that is complete), and "thoroughly furnished unto all good works," that is instructed and enabled to do good works; but these *must* be forthcoming if Holy Scripture is to be individually profitable to salvation.

There is a verse bearing upon this matter in S. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe¹." The Christians of Thessalonica received the Word from the hands of the Apostles not as the mere teaching of men, but as the word

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

of God; and because they believed, it worked effectually in them; i. e. it so wrought upon their spiritual life as to produce a good effect.

Now this is a result which we must all most earnestly desire from our Bible reading. There are many who despise the Word of God, or at least treat it with irreverence. Thus it is no uncommon thing to hear its veracity discussed in common conversation, or its sacred verses quoted in a familiar mood, or converted into puns and riddles. Oh! that we, who believe in the Divine origin of the Scriptures, could make some reparation to God for the insult thus offered to His Majesty. But this we can never do. "Our acts, indeed," says a living writer, "can add nothing to God; nor can one creature compensate for, any more than he can redeem another. . . But love is generous, and the heart's desires have, because of love, a value which is not their own, when heart meets heart in mutual sympathy¹."

Thus our Father in heaven, Who knows all, "and loves us better than He knows," is ever ready to accept the adoration of our souls, and to

¹ Rev. T. T. Carter.

recognise the reverence which we pay to His written Word even at the risk of being smiled at for our simplicity.

Many have been the martyrs who have died "for the Word's sake;" then surely *we* can bear a little scorn, if need be, sooner than see it trampled under foot or rudely handled without a protest.

And our love-offering will not go unrewarded; for the Lord Himself has said: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word¹."

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 2.

Tuesday after the Second Sunday.

“Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes.”—
Isaiah v. 21.

THE Prophet Isaiah, in pronouncing woe upon several classes of offenders, reckoned among them those who are wise in their own eyes. Now these are just the persons who would be the most surprised by the denunciation; the persons who would feel that, however it might be with the rest of mankind, *they*, at least, do not deserve it. And yet it is the divine sentence that says in these unmistakable words: “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes.”

Among these *wise ones* we have to reckon many a great thinker who, through lack of faith, refuses to accept the Holy Scriptures, or at any rate to recognise throughout them the inspired Word of God. In their own minds they have encouraged or permitted a contest between reason and revelation, using the intellect which

God has given them as a weapon of warfare against the "sword of the Spirit." The scepticism which is making such havoc among us in this present age is largely due to the thirst for knowledge and the love of scientific discovery which form a striking feature of the day. But is it not strange that any sensible mind should presume to place the laws of God's natural world in opposition to the Word of His revelation ?

Science is knowledge, and the acquisition of knowledge is an enviable thing. But there is, after all, no knowledge so real and invaluable as the knowledge of God. And not only so, but it is palpable to the simplest mind that the most abstruse and apparently learned propositions of the greatest scientist are but guesses at truth. The axioms of one generation are set aside by the reputed discoveries of the next ; but through all these changes the Bible remains the same. From generation to generation it has been handed down intact, its saving truths being never "out of date" or otherwise than in harmony with the requirements of every age.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away¹." No wonder that S. Paul counselled Timothy to keep that which had been committed to him, "avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called²."

To minds of a certain cast there is a fascination in unbelief. They like to freely handle the word of God, and to question if it fall in with their own preconceived notions, or with the scientific standard at which they have arrived. And, the longer they hesitate to accept the Word in all simplicity, the less capable do they become of understanding it.

But with all its fascination, this is a most distressing condition to fall unto. Hear the words of Lacordaire, an earnest priest of unwonted power and influence, who in youth had passed, for a period of ten years, through a terrible cloud of doubt and restlessness. "To myself," he wrote, "who have tasted alike the agony and the charm of unbelief, when I have poured one single drop of faith into a soul

¹ S. Matt. xxiv. 35.

² 1 Tim. vi. 20.

which suffers from the magic torture of its absence, I thank and bless God; and had I done so but once in my life, at the cost and labour of a hundred discourses, I would thank and bless Him for ever¹."

Thrilling words, enough to make one dread the first syllable which may shake one's confidence in the sacred Scriptures. The wavering Christian had wandered long among the intricacies of philosophy; but, when at length he drank in the pure water of the Word of Life, he felt like a tired and thirsty warrior, to whom relief had come after the strain of an agonising conflict. "I am as glad of Thy Word as one that findeth great spoils²."

The time will come when "the loftiness of man shall be bowed down," when intellectual exclusiveness will be crushed, "and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day³."

Oh! guard me, good Lord, from the fatal error of swerving one step from the path of

¹ See Mrs. Sidney Lear's Biographical Sketch of Lacordaire.

² Ps. cxix. 162.

³ See Isaiah ii. 17.

faith; and permit me, by persistent reverence,
for Thy holy Word, to encourage others to
accept it with their whole heart!

“Lord, Thy word abideth,
And our footsteps guideth;
Who its truth believeth
Light and joy receiveth.

Who can tell the pleasure,
Who recount the treasure,
By Thy Word imparted
To the simple-hearted?

Oh! that we discerning
Its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear Thee,
Evermore be near Thee.”

Wednesday after the Second Sunday.

“Thy word is a lantern unto my feet : and a light unto my paths.”—*Psalms* cxix. 105.

OUR chief aim during the short span of our earthly life must be to gain a knowledge of God, because this knowledge can alone bring us full satisfaction in the eternal ages to come. We refer to an intimate personal knowledge of God, such as must inevitably result in a fearless, because *perfect*, love of Him¹. Now this knowledge may be acquired through the medium of the Eternal Son Who, in taking upon Him our nature, stooped to our feeble comprehensions. He was The Word, Who from the beginning had been with God, and was God. “God Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son²” . . . Who is “the brightness of His glory, and

¹ See 1 S. John. iv. 18.

² Heb. i. 1, 2,

the express image of His Person¹." Well might Jesus say to His disciples—"If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also²;" and to His Father—"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent³."

But how shall we know the Son and through Him the Father? How, but by a prayerful study of the written Word? "Search the Scriptures," said our Lord, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me⁴."

Truly a wondrous book is the Holy Bible; the more we study it, the more do we find in it depths of Truth and beauty and mystery which we have never yet discovered. It is of all books the one which needs the most to be approached with an awed and teachable spirit; and well may we pray for grace so to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the sacred truths that by patience and comfort of God's Holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the *hope of everlasting Life*

¹ Heb. i. 3.

² S. John viii. 19.

³ S. John xvii. 3.

⁴ S. John v. 39.

given to us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. We must not only read, but mark, i.e. note and carefully observe the heavenly words of wisdom; and, with the spiritual hunger of men who long to be fed with strong meat, must do our utmost by God's grace to digest them, so that they may nourish our souls, and act beneficially upon our lives.

But no one must expect to understand with the intellect all that Holy Scripture contains. How should the finite compass the infinite? Mysteries there must needs be until "this mortal shall have put on immortality." And *then* those who have walked by faith through the twilight of this earthly life, shall be admitted to the full brightness of the heavenly vision, when their "eyes shall see the King in His beauty¹." Just for a few moments let me consider what there has been in my past study of the Holy Scriptures which has hindered my gaining through them a deeper knowledge and more fervent love of God. Perhaps I have read in a desultory way, without any direct aim, or distinct concentration of

¹ Is. xxxiii. 17.

thought. No work of any depth or learning will be profitable if read in this fashion, least of all the Bible. Perhaps I have studied it with a view to an intellectual acquirement of its contents, but with no desire to apply to myself its precepts and warnings and hopes. Studied thus, it becomes a dead letter. A pious writer has made this sensible remark, to the truth of which thousands of holy souls can testify: "The Bible has some especial teaching for every one of us, a word of joy and tender love from God to each individual soul, and if we go on reading in faith, patiently waiting for it, that special word will find us, and thrill our souls with the certainty that God himself is speaking to us, and that He knows our wants and cares and needs¹." Perhaps I have been impatient of the obscurities which meet me in every page. But I must bear in mind that God's Word is to be "a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths²." I must not expect to find in it the broad daylight which can illumine the whole landscape, but just so much of illumin-

¹ Annie Keary.

² Ps. cxix. 105.

ation as is sufficient to guide me on my heavenward course.

“Lead, kindly light, I do not ask to see
The distant scene, one step enough for me.”

And the day will assuredly come, sooner or later, as the reward of perseverance, when I shall be able to take up the Psalmist's words and say, “Thy testimonies have I claimed as mine heritage for ever : and why ? they are the very joy of my heart¹.”

May it please Thee, O Merciful God, to give me increase of grace to hear meekly Thy Word, and to receive it with pure, undivided affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.

I beseech Thee to hear me, Good Lord.

¹ Ps. cxix. lxxi.

Thursday after the Second Sunday.

“What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?”—*Isaiah* v. 4.

IN the morning lesson for last Sunday we heard the touching song which the Lord sang to His people by the voice of His chosen Prophet. Its subject was a parable, and parables, we know, were largely used in Eastern countries to convey some deep spiritual teaching. Isaiah called together the people of Jerusalem, we must suppose, to a place of public meeting, and there sang to them the song of his well-beloved, the song of the Lord God in Whom his soul delighted. The substance of it was this: God had made a vineyard in a fruitful hill; taking out the stones from the rough soil, He had planted it with the choicest vine, to which He gave every possible care and attention. Coming in the time of fruit harvest to look for rich clusters,

which might have been expected from a vine so well tended, He nevertheless found nothing thereon but wild grapes. Here the singer bursts forth in an appeal to the feelings of his hearers and to their sense of justice, "Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes¹?"

Then comes the threat which must inevitably follow. "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste, &c²." And then the application; for the parable was a portrait of the very people who were too obtuse, too obstinate to see themselves in the fruitless vine; nay, worse than fruitless, for the wild grapes typified the abominations proceeding from the very nation whom God deigned to call "His pleasant plant³." Grievous punishments, sent to chastise the rebellious Jews, failed to bring them to their

¹ Is. v. 3, 4.

² ver. 5, 6.

³ ver. 7.

senses. And if God had heretofore given them privileges denied to other nations, and had hedged them about with the covenant rite of circumcision, separating them for Himself, what shall be said of the coming among them of the Christ to be a Son of their royal line? Surely He was a very tower of defence in the midst of the favoured vineyard. And yet they did not heed Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not¹."

But there is a further application of this parable; for none will deny that the Christian Church is in the very truest sense "the choicest vine of the Lord's planting." It is the divine institution which grew out of the half withered roots of the older dispensation. It was revived by the commission of Christ to His chosen Apostles after He had watered it with His own Blood²; and again by the out-pouring of His Holy Spirit³. Well may the Husbandman look for good fruit from such a plant. But what does He see at present in the Christian Church?

¹ S. John i. 11. ² S. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20; S. John xx. 21-23.

³ Acts ii. 1-4.

The wild grapes of discord and division, of apathy and supineness, or of immoderate and ill-directed zeal! Oh! that in the short time yet remaining the various branches of His one Church may rouse themselves to a better mind, and, walking in the light of His truth, may "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace¹."

But once more let me listen to the song of the Well-beloved, for it has a special message for me. In His own vineyard, the Church, our God has provided for each individual soul such means of grace as are sufficient to sustain the spiritual life and guard it against dangers from without. Especially may *we* boast in this favoured land and Church that we have been planted in a very fruitful hill; for we may enjoy, without let or hindrance, the full privileges of our communion, in which we have the Word of God freely circulated and preached, the sacraments and ordinances duly administered, and our souls cared for by a faithful and apostolic ministry. To live under such conditions is an unspeakable blessing; but it has corresponding responsi-

¹ Eph iv. 3.

bilities. When the Planter comes back to seek fruit on his choice vines, shall He be disappointed?

There is one person for whom I have it in my power to answer. My Lord hath in *me* a vine of His own planting; by His grace I am placed in a well-weeded corner of His Church. Shall I not make haste to bring forth the good fruit of holy living, lest, coming again, He find in me only the wild fruit of my uncultured, untamed will?

Oh! help me, good Lord, as the seasons come round, with their fructifying rains and sunshine, so to use them as to forward my growth in grace; and grant that the fruits of holiness may be found in me, not small and in scanty measure, but in rich abundance, sweet and fine, and full of ripeness.

Friday after the Second Sunday.

“In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek.”—*Isaiah xi. 10.*

WE are all familiar with the story of the Jewish captivity, when the chosen people were delivered into the hands of their enemies, and carried away into Babylon. We know how Daniel and the three Israelitish children suffered in the land of their exile, while witnessing for the majesty of Israel's God. It was while prophesying of these troublous times that Isaiah burst forth in a hopeful key, with the declaration that after the appointed term of misery there should come a return of joy and glory: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him¹.” The royal house of David, son of Jesse, was to be cut down and trodden under foot, during the seventy years' captivity, and

¹ *Isaiah xi. 1, 2.*

was never to be restored to temporal power and grandeur. But from the cut-down trunk a rod should sprout, and from the roots a branch should bud forth; and thus, from the earthly kingdom, which was trampled to death, there would issue a heavenly kingdom, which should endure for evermore. A noble prophecy, fulfilled to the letter by the reign of the King of kings, Who was born of David's line.

Thus Jeremiah spake: "I will cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land ¹;" and again, "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper . . . and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS ²."

Magnificent prophecies, full of hope and encouragement for a torn and wasted people. But let us look at the chapter in Isaiah which we are considering to-day, and we shall see that the promise was not for the Jews alone, but for all nations: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse,

¹ Jer. xxxiii. 15.

² Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

which shall stand for an ensign of the people ; to it shall the Gentiles seek." There is no need to remind ourselves at this moment how, after the birth of the Saviour of the house and lineage of David, strangers came from afar to acknowledge and worship Him ; and how in a very short space the Gospel of the kingdom was preached to them which were afar off, as well as to those that were near. Rather we would spend a few minutes in dwelling upon the significant clause—"which shall stand for an ensign of the people."

The heavenly King, who in His human nature was descended from Jesse the Bethlehemite, and who was consecrated to a glorious mission by the Spirit of the Lord¹, began His earthly career as the child of a peasant maid (though of a royal line), or, to use the Prophet's simile, as a sucker springing from a worn-out root² ; and only through ignominy and suffering could He pass to His triumphant glory. But from His cross of shame He reigned a King ; and who will deny that He has become "an ensign of the people,"

¹ Isaiah xi. 1-3.

² See "Readings on the First Lessons" by Rev. Peter Young.

a standard-bearer in Whom centre the hopes of a fallen race?

It remains for me to ask myself if I have accepted this ensign for my own. Do my hopes really centre in Him? It may be that there is something in my surroundings which draws me off from following Him, or some idol in my heart which holds me back. But, oh! the madness of permitting any hindrance to an entire surrender to my Lord.

The Branch of the Lord is widespread, and under its shadow I might dwell safely, but one sin harboured and cherished must inevitably bar my approach to Him. Let me not grudge to cast away every barrier, or shrink from a bold confession of Him Who, though once a peasant Babe, is now a King enthroned. With Micah, let me glory in saying: "All people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever¹."

¹ Micah iv. 5.

Saturday after the Second Sunday.

“ Watch ye therefore, and pray always.”—*S. Luke xxi. 36.*

A VERY few days before His death, our blessed Saviour foretold before a multitude of people the pending fate of Jerusalem. The sin-beladen city was doomed, and the Lord Whom it spurned, though He had come to redeem it, uttered a cry of lamentation over its reprobacy: “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not¹!”

Soon afterwards, His own disciples followed Jesus to the Mount of Olives, and asked Him privately when the things foretold should come to pass; and what sign should be given of His return at the end of the world. Whereupon He gave a vivid description of the evils which were to befall their beautiful city; and then

¹ *S. Matt. xxiii. 37.*

passed on to an account of the things which must immediately precede His coming to Judgment¹. There will be a period of "great tribulation²," and we must bear in mind the significance of the word. *Tribulation* is derived from a Latin term, meaning *threshing instrument*; and, used in a moral sense, it implies that the tribulation is sent to test the person whom it afflicts, to winnow out the bad from his character, leaving the good to be garnered.

There will be, then, a great testing in the latter days; men's faith will be tried to the uttermost; for, persecutions will be rife, and members of one family will "fall out, and chide and fight." Then will come the darkening of the sun, more terrible than the darkness of Egypt, and the moon shall not give her light; and the stars shall fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken³.

Awful convulsions of nature! we tremble sometimes in a violent thunderstorm, or a frightful hurricane; what will it be when those worse terrors come upon us all at once? Upon the

¹ See S. Matt. xxiv.

² xxiv. 21.

³ xxiv. 29.

earth there will be "distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear¹."

Which of us now living could stand the test of that universal threshing? Which of us in a time of unwonted trial or persecution would remain true to our faith? Which of us would unflinchingly confess Christ and, in spite of ignominy, go on in the straight path of duty?

We know not how soon those days may come upon us. Dark clouds are lowering in the distance, and storm-clouds often travel swiftly. Our best safe-guard against utter defeat is in arming ourselves betimes, that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand²;" ay, to stand before our Judge in calm assurance of acquittal through His merits, Who alone can procure our pardon and salvation.

The days in which we live are comparatively quiet and safe; but let not this fact lure me into a dangerous lukewarmness. It is now, before the fiercest battle rages, that I must make proof of my armour. I must keep a firm grasp of "the

¹ S. Luke xxi. 25.

² Eph. vi. 13.

sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," and strive to understand the principles of the Faith, as taught by it through the interpretation of the Church; for otherwise it would fare ill with me in the day when "false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect¹." And, further, I must discipline myself now in my daily life to "endure hardness as a good soldier;" for only so can I hope to be ready in God's great might to stand the shock of temptations *then*, or to endure the grievous afflictions which will surely come upon all.

Oh! grant me grace, most holy Jesu, to watch and pray always, that, though in myself unworthy, I may through Thy merits be *accounted* worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before Thee in full assurance of Hope.

¹ S. Mark xiii. 22.

Third Sunday in Advent.

“Year after year has Advent brought
Nearer to us the Prize we sought,
But still it lingers, oh ! that we
Were more prepared to welcome Thee.”
Monseil's Spiritual Songs.

OUR Blessed Lord, in His dealings with men, was always wont to acquaint them with coming troubles. And surely it is the part of a true friend and well-wisher to warn people of danger rather than leave them in a false security. We saw, yesterday, how Jesus foretold the pending destruction of Jerusalem and the still more awful calamities of the last days. By His warnings He gives to all His followers of every age and clime the opportunity of preparing themselves against the evils to come. To-day let us consider that concluding portion of His predictions which tells of His own coming in the glory of His majesty.

Immediately after the tribulation, and while the sun and moon are darkened and the powers

of Heaven convulsed, there "shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory¹." The awful day of judgment shall come, says our Lord, "as a snare on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth²." Doubtless many will be engaged in sinful courses, and well-nigh all will be pursuing their usual avocations when they shall be startled by a sign in the heavens, which is to herald the approach of the Judge. "And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn;" that is, those who have lived to themselves in forgetfulness of the God Who made them.

Through sight and hearing, both, will men be terror-stricken; for there will be the sight of the wondrous majesty and surpassing purity of the all-just Judge, and the sound of that terrible blast of angels' trumpets which is to summon all the world to their account, waking up the dead from their graves and the living from their

¹ S. Matt. xxiv. 30.

² S. Luke xxi. 35.

sleep of sin. In vain will the conscience-stricken call on the mountains to hide them, for they *must* be a gazing-stock of men and angels, while with their own eyes they must look on Him Whom they have pierced.

We cannot picture to ourselves with half its intensity the horror of those who are found at that day unprepared. They hear the trumpet call which must be instantly obeyed, they see the myriads of spotless angels, and thousands of holy souls, some of whom they have known in the flesh, and have wronged perhaps, and hated, or loved and venerated; and for very shame they blush and tremble.

But now let us contrast with all this the calm confidence of those who in the midst of such a scene can look up, and lift up their heads assured that their redemption draweth nigh¹. They have put their trust in Him Whose "goodness faileth never," and having followed Him in lowliness, they can now, while others cower beneath His gaze, look up, and, undazzled, behold Him in His benign and radiant beauty, and hear

¹ See S. Luke **xxi.** 28.

His thrilling voice of welcome : " Well done, good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord¹."

Oh ! the glory and gladness of the triumph-day for those to whom the archangel's blast shall be as the sound of a silver trumpet, heralding the approach of a Saviour friend ! May we so live through this short life of ours, that the Lord's second coming may be to us a glad surprise ; the return in person of an elder Brother rather than the coming of a thief in the night.

"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.

"We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge."

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost².

¹ See S. Matt. xxv. 21.

² See Rom. xv. 13.

Monday after the Third Sunday.

“Behold I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me.”—*Malachi* iii. 1.

CENTURY after century, beginning with the date of Adam's fall, a long line of prophecies foretold the coming of a Redeemer. The line was closed by Malachi, whose utterances were made about 400 years before the birth of Jesus Christ; and he ended by introducing him who was to be “more than a prophet,” the immediate herald of the Lord.

“Hebrew prophecy in Malachi,” says a commentator¹, “resigns its charge to the personal forerunner and immediate messenger of Christ, and expires with the Gospel on its lips.” Surely everything was done that could be devised to enable a perverse and short-sighted people to recognise the Lord Jehovah when He came to be

¹ Bishop Wordsworth.

their Saviour. The cessation of prophecy for four centuries did but bring into striking prominence the message of S. John the Baptist.

John precisely answered to Isaiah's account of him, and even referred his hearers to the latter's prophecy, saying: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias¹."

And Christ Himself testified to the Baptist's mission, declaring in plain terms: "This is he of whom it is written, Behold I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee²."

Many, it is true, aye, multitudes, heard the Baptist gladly; but, for the most part, they gave no credence to his announcement of the Saviour. It is one thing to listen with itching ears to a striking preacher, another thing to appropriate his message of warning and counsel; one thing to see him point the way to the Lamb of God, and quite another to rise up and meekly "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." A few, indeed, receiving the witness of John, gladly enlisted

¹ S. John i. 23.

² S. Matt. xi. 10.

in the service of Christ, looking to Him as to the One Who should take away the sin of the world. Such were S. Andrew and S. Peter, who were afterwards of the number of the Twelve Apostles, and were among the chief pillars of the Church. But how strange that the great mass of the Jewish people could not, or would not recognise the Deliverer for Whom they had been waiting for centuries, and that when He came "they hid, as it were, their faces from Him." Not without a sadly solemn meaning was Jehovah's prophetic lament: "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed¹?"

And is there no lesson for us in this rejection of the Messiah by His ancient people? *They* looked forward to His first coming, yet when He was pointed out to them by His chosen messenger, they received him not. Perhaps He had tarried too long for their weak faith; and so they had

¹ Isaiah liii. 1. "The asker (of this question) is great, for He is the living God. The *report* is the Gospel, the effect of receiving it *salvation*: the arm of the Lord is Jesus Christ His Son. Its revelation is eternal life."—*The Love of the Atonement*, by BISHOP MILMAN.

ceased to look for Him. And we? ah! we are on the watch for His second Advent; but year after year the Advent note has sounded; we have been so long in the waiting attitude, that perhaps we begin to weary of the strain, and to relax our efforts to be ready with our lights burning. With a contemptuous smile at the credulity of the humble souls who never flag, we say within ourselves: "Where is the promise of His coming?"

But is it thus with me? O God of mercy, forbid it, I beseech Thee. Give me eyes to see and ears to hear, that I reject not my Lord and Saviour, when He comes to fulfil his promise.

"Ye servants of the Lord,
Each in his office wait;
Observant of His heavenly Word,
And watchful at His gate.

Watch! tis your Lord's command,
And while we speak He's near;
Mark the first signal of His hand,
And ready all appear.

Oh! happy servant he,
In such a posture found;
He shall his Lord with rapture see,
And be with honour crowned."

Tuesday after the Third Sunday.

“He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me.”—*S. Matt. x. 40.*

As the first Advent of the Son of God to this fallen world was heralded by S. John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness, so His second Advent is proclaimed by ministers, duly set apart and ordained to prepare the way before Him. We saw yesterday how that the first men who humbly accepted the Baptist's testimony were honoured by the Christ, Whom they welcomed, in being called to be Apostles. They were sent forth by Him on their sacred mission with this Divine commendatory word: “He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me.”

This is a powerful saying; we have heard it scores and hundreds of times, but perhaps with little consideration of its weightiness. The

Apostles bore their Master's commission, and that Master bore His Father's; therefore, whosoever received or rejected the Apostles, received or rejected their Lord, and God the Father, Who had sent Him.

The same declaration holds good of the people of all ages to whom the ministers of the Holy Catholic Church bring the glad tidings of salvation. For in the Church of Christ there has been and will continue to be till the end of time, a regular succession of bishops, priests and deacons, whose credentials date back to the original commission of Christ Himself¹. "As My Father hath sent Me," said our Lord to His first Apostles, "even so send I you²," that is, with the same power and authority to commission others. "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world³;" "*with you and your successors*, so long as there is a world to be reclaimed, and a militant Church to witness for Me. *With you*, in your great work of

¹ See Dr. Hook's "Church Dictionary," Percival's "Apology for the Doctrine of the Apostolic Succession," and other books.

² S. John xx. 21.

³ S. Matt. xxviii. 20.

winning souls and building them up a hallowed temple for My service; aye, till the shadows of earth shall recede before the rising of the perfect day, when I shall have come again in glory to crown My faithful Church with a fadeless diadem."

Do we think it strange that there were many who closed their doors upon the Apostles, who came direct from personal intercourse with their Lord? Oh! surely, it is yet more strange that in *these* days there should be numbers who give little heed to the preaching of the faithful pastor, and who make it hard for him to deliver his message. For *we* have the witness of more than eighteen centuries to the truth of Christianity; the Gospel has *proved* itself "the power of God unto salvation¹." The whole world is being gradually won over by the preaching of the Word; the Church is leavening the world. Shall we, in our island home, where, for the last 1500 years or more, her influence has been felt, shall we be individually so foolish as to look coldly on her ministry? It is not a question of the

¹ Romans i. 16.

personal holiness or attractiveness of the clergy ; the only question is : Are they the bearers to us of God's message ? Are they the appointed administrators of His sacraments and ordinances ?

Oh ! surely we would not put stumbling-blocks in the way of those " who labour in the word and doctrine¹," and hinder them from imparting to us the manifold grace of God. If we would, it must be at our own peril. They, when they have done their best, may shake off the dust of the inhospitable city from their feet ; but the Word of the Lord to them has gone forth, and must hold good for ever : " He that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me²."

"Come, Lord, come Wisdom, Love and Power,
Open our ears to hear ;
Let us not miss the accepted hour,
Save, Lord, by love or fear."

¹ 1 Tim. v. 17.

² S. Luke x. 16.

Wednesday after the Third Sunday.

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low : and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.”—*Isaiah* xl. 4.

WHEN Isaiah prophesied of S. John the Baptist and his wonderful preaching, the preaching which was to prepare the way of the Lord, he went on to shew in what manner that way was to be prepared. The whole passage is a sort of allegory, a beautiful and poetic method of instruction.

The Baptist is represented as urging the people to make straight in the desert a highway for their God. In the desert or barren land of unbelief, ignorance and iniquity, a royal road was to be made, meet for the advent of an Almighty Prince.

But how? All valleys were to be raised, all mountains to be laid low, crooked places to be made straight, and rough places plain and smooth ;

thus a straight road would be secured, along which the Prince of Peace could travel unimpeded.

So far the allegory. Now let us look for the hidden meaning. First, the mountains surely represent the proud and self-opinionated, those who trust in their own merits for salvation; who, like the Pharisee, thank God in the haughtiness of their spirit that they are not as other men. If the Saviour was to be indeed a Saviour for *them*, they must stoop and bow down before Him. The high looks of the proud must be subdued; for "thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones¹." Secondly, the valleys would seem to picture those timid souls who need to be encouraged in the way of righteousness, or those, perhaps, who are weak and wavering in the faith. If such were to be ready to receive their Lord when He came in guise of a peasant-babe, they must ask

¹ Isaiah lvii. 15.

for grace to fill up that which was lacking in their faith and practice, that they might be raised to a higher level. For such we pray in our Litany that God would "comfort and help the weak-hearted, and raise up them that fall." Thirdly, the "crooked" are those sly souls who are perverse in their generation, and prone to ways of deceit. They had need to be made straight if they desired to welcome the Saviour-God ; for "they that are of a froward heart are an abomination to the Lord ; but such as are upright in their way are His delight¹." Fourthly, the rough places are those uncontrolled spirits which chafe and fret at discipline, those unruly tempers and unchastened passions, which must yield to the Spirit of grace and soberness before they can be fit to accept the offer of salvation.

And now the Prophet declares that, when all is ready for the coming Deliverer, there shall be a manifestation of Jehovah's glory: "God (shall be) manifested in the flesh." "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together²."

¹ Prov. xi. 20.

² Isaiah xl. 5.

Oh! wondrous consummation! too hard for man's belief, had it not been that the mouth of the Lord had spoken it.

We wonder that so few were found to prepare themselves for the unfolding of Jehovah's glory; we are amazed that any should have preferred their own darkness to the true Light which came down from Heaven. But how is it with ourselves? All through this Advent season we are being asked to prepare to welcome a Saviour's birth in a glad commemoration. Have we set ourselves in earnest to the task?

When the bells ring out soft and clear on Christmas Day, there will be no true joy for us unless we have made straight in the desert of our souls a highway for our God. The hills of pride must be lowered, the valleys of cowardice and sloth must be raised, the crooked ways of falsity be made straight, and rough places of lawless passion be made plain; for only so can we hope to keep the Feast with holy joy.

Ay, and the advent of the same Lord in His capacity of Judge may, perhaps, be not far distant.

“The world is very evil,
The times are waxing late;
Be sober and keep vigil,
The Judge is at the gate.
The Judge who comes with mercy,
The Judge who comes with might;
Who comes to end the evil,
Who comes to crown the right.”

Then shall the glory of the Lord be indeed revealed, “and all flesh shall see it together.” But shall *we* see it with fear and trembling, or with the exultant bliss of souls redeemed?

Oh! help us now, Blest Spirit, so to take Christ Jesus for our Lord, that in that day He may be to us a Saviour and a Friend!

Thursday after the Third Sunday.

“With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.”
—1 *Cor.* iv. 3.

S. PAUL appears to be speaking of himself as a pastor in the Christian Church, for he begins this passage thus: “Let a man so account of us, as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” He claims consideration by reason of the sanctity of his office. He and his fellows in the ministry ought to be received as servants and ambassadors of Christ, as stewards, or custodians of His mysteries, that is, of His Word and Sacraments.

But he acknowledges the responsibilities of office: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” A just requirement undoubtedly, but who is to pass judgment with regard to it? “With me,” he continues, “it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you,

or of man's judgment." He knew perhaps something of the propensity that there is in people to think hardly of those who, in the discharge of their duty, "reprove, rebuke and exhort." "For I know nothing by myself (literally, against myself). Yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord." The Apostle was not conscious of any deviation from the path of duty; he had lived in all good conscience before God and man. Therefore, had he constituted himself his own judge, he might have been too lenient. For the fact of his being unaware of sins and shortcomings did not render or prove him blameless; therefore, he commended himself to the Lord, Who "knows all, yet loves us better than He knows." We seem to have a two-fold lesson in this passage. The first cautions us against passing judgment upon others; and this because, with our finite knowledge, we cannot possibly weigh their actions in an accurate balance.

But our concern to-day is with the second division of our subject, that which inculcates moral courage. "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgement."

This is not the language of the worldling or the craven, it is not the language of the parasite or courtier. It is the sentiment of one who looks beyond and above this present world, content to walk on in the straight path of duty, whether in the sunshine of well-merited praise, or the cold shade of a cruel blame, till he may stand before the tribunal of the Judge, Who alone can unravel the intricacies of our lives and read the secrets of our hearts.

Undue praise and undeserved blame are trials even to the best among us, tempting either to servility and self-conceit, or to moroseness and jealousy. And yet there are those who have so weaned themselves from the things of sense, that they *can* pass through unhurt. They can say with the Apostle—"With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you" (whether for good or evil); "He that judgeth me is the Lord."

Does adulation meet us with its honied words? we will reply in the language of our saintly poet¹:

¹ Keble's "Christian Year."

“Wild Fancy, peace, thou must not me beguile
With thy false smile;
I know thy flatteries, and thy cheating ways;
Be silent, Praise,
Blind guide, with siren voice, and blinding all
That hear thy call.”

Or does the tongue of the slanderer make free
with our name, shooting out his arrows, even
bitter words¹? then we will strive to calm our
troubled spirit, committing ourselves and our
cause “to Him that judgeth righteously.”

“Come, Resignation, spirit meek,
And let me kiss thy placid cheek;
And read in thy pale eye serene
Their blessing who by Faith can wean
Their hearts from sense and learn to love
God only, and the joys above².”

O Lord my God, Who knowest the motives of
all our actions, have mercy upon me. Pardon
my cowardice and selfishness; and endue me with
singleness of heart to do all as in Thy sight.
Hear me, I pray, for Jesus Christ's sake.

¹ See Ps. lxiv. 3.

² The Christian Year.

Friday after the Third Sunday.

“Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified.”—*2 Thess.* iii. 1.

ONCE more we bring forward the subject of the Christian ministry; for we are constrained to dwell upon it during this Ember week, while the Church is praying to the Chief Shepherd of souls to guide her in the choice of pastors to tend and feed His flocks.

These four Ember seasons are solemn and momentous periods, for the Church has need of a vigilant pastorate to care for the scattered sheep throughout the world, and to guard and nourish those within the fold. Then, shall we let this week go past without offering daily a fervent prayer to God that He will guide and govern the minds of His servants, our bishops, that they may choose fit persons for sacred office in the Church?

And for those to be ordained, shall not a chorus of prayer go up, that they may be endowed with wisdom and power for the discharge of their onerous duties?

Ah! when shall we learn to acknowledge our responsibilities in this matter? When shall we respond to the entreaty of every faithful but anxious pastor—"Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified"? How can it have free course when we wrangle and criticise as we are apt to do instead of meekly receiving the Word which they preach, and thankfully accepting the divine mysteries of which they are the stewards and dispensers¹?

"Oh! if but half the breath that's spent
To vex the weak, and blame the wrong,
Found thus in Faith and Prayer its vent,
How glad would be the Church's song²."

If pastors and people would but labour and pray together for the establishment of their Master's Kingdom, they would assuredly be

¹ See 1 Cor. iv. 1.

² Monsell's Spiritual Songs.

hastening that visible unity of the Church of God which is so much to be desired. "Is this a dream?" asks a living writer,¹ in allusion to the blessedness of visible unity, "a shadowy phantom of the days which never were and never will be? You may call it what you like, but it is the vision of Jesus. It is the sight which lit up His departing eyes, and kindled His breaking heart into a flame of prayer. 'Father,' He said, 'I pray that they may all be one, as Thou art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may be one in Us.'"

Let us see, every one of us, if we cannot exercise a deeper, albeit a hidden influence on the Church's ministry by a fuller use of intercessory prayer. Let us never weary of knocking at Heaven's gate if we may thus strengthen the hands of those who *watch for our souls, as they that must give account*².

"Jesu, with Thy Church abide,
Be her Saviour, Lord, and Guide,
While on Earth her Faith is tried.
We beseech Thee, hear us.

¹ Rev. George Tugwell.

² See Heb. xiii. 17.

Save her love from growing cold,
Make her watchmen strong and bold;
Fence her round, Thy peaceful fold.
We beseech Thee, hear us.

May her priests Thy people feed,
Shepherds of the flock indeed;
Ready, where Thou call'st to lead.
We beseech Thee, hear us."

Saturday after the Third Sunday.

"In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."—*Isaiah xxv. 6.*

THIS is a remarkable verse, coming in the middle of a remarkable chapter. Taken as a whole, the chapter represents the condition of the Christian Church at the end of the world; when, her conflict over and her victory won, she sings the triumphant song of the redeemed, giving all the glory to the Lord her God.

Let us see what is meant by "the feast of fat things," which the Lord of hosts Himself will make at that day unto all people. It signifies, doubtless, the marriage-supper of the Lamb in heaven¹. There, on the "great and high mountain²," "the home of God's elect," and the seat of His unveiled glory, will be gathered together the

¹ See Rev. xix. 7-9.

² xxi. 10.

redeemed of every nation of the earth, clad in the white robes of righteousness. Their souls will "be satisfied, even as it were with marrow and fatness¹." The spiritual feast will consist of all that is purest and best (the wines on the lees being strong and clear, from having been well fermented and long kept); and the company will be composed of all those who in their earthly life have worn the yoke of Jesus Christ; to every one of them will be given harps, and golden vials of incense², and they will sing to Him Who has saved them "a new song, saying—Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests³."

Such is to be the full blessedness of the saints when the shadows of earth shall have passed away. But, even here, during our warfare with sin and Satan, there is for Christ's people a fore-taste of the endless bliss. There is in the Church below a feast of fat things, and of wines

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 6.

² Rev. v. 8.

³ v. 9, 10.

on the lees prepared by His own hand for all who seek Him in sincerity. At His holy table, where the Sacrifice of Calvary is continually pleaded, the faithful may partake of the meat, which nourisheth to everlasting life, and of the stream which freely flowed for their salvation. And this feast is a bond of union, joining the Christian pilgrim, as with Christ his Leader, so with the faithful who have gone before, in one sweet fellowship.

“Hail, sacred Feast, which Jesus makes,
Rich banquet of His flesh and blood;
Thrice happy he who here partakes,
That sacred stream, that Heavenly food.”

Thrice happy! yes, even here; for the devout communicant has within him the life which may participate ever more and more in the likeness of Christ. And this sweet bliss is mine, if only I *will* to accept it in all humility.

But then (ah! there is always a *but* to qualify our joy and happiness in this present world) there is still the admixture of sin in our own selves and the presence of sin all around. The contact with evil is painful, the battle with

temptations distressing. So long as we dwell in this vale of tears it must be so, for the shadows fall thick in our path, and the mists hang with a clammy moisture round about us. Look up, then, poor trembling soul, up to the mountain top. There, in the sunshine of thy Saviour's presence, thou shalt one day bask; when He, the Son of righteousness, shall have lifted the mists of darkness and error, and opened out the full beauties of God's boundless truth and love.

"He will destroy in this mountain," so runs the word of prophecy, "the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces . . . for the Lord hath spoken it¹."

"O happy, holy portion,
Refection for the blest;
True vision of true beauty,
True cure of the distrest!
Strive, man, to win that glory,
Toil, man, to gain that light;
Send hope before to grasp it,
Till hope be lost in sight."

¹ Isaiah xxv. 7, 8.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

"If indeed the Lord is at hand, why should we be careful, so as to be very much concerned or anxious about anything which can happen to us here? Happiness or sorrow, riches or poverty, death or life, what matters? The *Lord* is at hand; *that* is the matter for our care."—J. H. VERNON.

WE are drawing very near to the close of our Advent season. The coming of the Lord is three weeks nearer to us than when we began to consider it. It becomes us to pause and ask if we be any fitter than we then were to receive Him. We began by making resolutions on Advent Sunday to prepare for Him; have we in any degree fulfilled them?

The subject of Christ's coming can never be one of indifference to any single soul; for, indeed, it affects the whole universe more than any other event can affect it. As the whole human race fell with Adam's fall, so every individual of that race must be lifted up (if at all) by Him Who is "the One Mediator between God and men, the

Man Christ Jesus¹." It is of paramount importance, then, that we claim Him for our Saviour, and take Him for our great Exemplar.

Let me ask myself this day if I be ready with deep humility and earnest fealty to receive for my Sovereign Ruler Him Who will be preached on Christmas Day as the helpless, smiling Babe of a peasant mother, the little new-born Child Who had to be cradled in a manger, because there was no room for His parents in the inn.

Oh! yes, I will welcome Him the more boldly because a thankless world looks coldly on Him. In my poor heart, if nowhere else, there shall be a throne for Him, a throne to which no rival shall be admitted. But I must make haste to prepare it; for, already, the Lord is at hand.

This very day on my knees, in some quiet place, I will seek to discover what sin there is still lurking within me; and that sin by God's grace I will cast out, for it is the idol enthroned on the seat which must be ready for my King.

Oh! if I thus make ready for Him, what a glow will be shed over the Christmas Festival!

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

what radiancy will beam from the cradle of Bethlehem! In my Christmas Communion I shall be permitted to feel not merely that the Lord is at hand, but that He is here already, here in sacramental presence to strengthen and refresh my soul; here to abide in me, that I may bring forth much fruit, and that my joy may be full ¹.

Ay, full indeed; for then, come sickness, come health, it will not matter to me. And death when that becomes my lot, aye, death itself will not be unwelcome, for it will but strengthen and make for ever sure the bond between my Lord and me. And, in return for a throne in my heart of hearts, He will give me, oh! marvellous reward, a place in *His* Throne, where I may reign with Him for evermore ².

Hark! I hear Him pleading with me now, and asking for my allegiance:

“Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above;
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

¹ See S. John xv. 5, 11.

² See Rev. iii. 21.

Thou shalt see My glory soon,
When the work of grace is done ;
Partner of My Throne shall be,
Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me?"

Shall I not answer with the trembling devo-
tion of a true heart—

"Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is weak and faint ;
Yet I love Thee, and adore,
O for grace to love Thee more."

Monday after the Fourth Sunday.

“Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you : for the Lord is a God of judgment : blessed are all they that wait for Him.”—*Isaiah xxx. 18.*

IN the earlier part of this chapter the Prophet threatens the rebellious Jews with God's wrath for their contempt of His Word. He warns them of terrible judgments awaiting them ; such ravages were to be made among them by the sword, that a very small remnant would be left.

But here comes in the note of mercy ; for God, in His tenderness, always has an eye to the faithful few who have kept themselves undefiled. “Therefore,” says the prophet, “will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you.” It was the will of God that His disobedient servants should be miserably reduced before their punishments

should cease; therefore he would delay His mercy. They were to be shewn what were the terrible consequences of sin, in order that they might be brought to their senses and converted, "for the Lord is a God of judgment."

And then we come upon a significant anti-thesis: "Blessed are all they that wait for Him." The nation as a whole was to be judged for its iniquities; but every soul that waited for its God would be blessed. And is it not thus in every age and clime? In times of great public distress, when the judgments of God are upon the earth, and His mercy tarries while His attribute of justice is being satisfied, they who wait for His time in lowly patience, meekly bending beneath His rod, they shall be blessed indeed.

For "the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee¹."

Holy Church is a safe shelter for all who will tarry the Lord's leisure; there they may be

¹ Isaiah xxx. 19.

strong, and He shall comfort their hearts. Amid the turmoil of this earthly life, the Church is an ark of safety, where inward peace and eternal salvation may be enjoyed, be the external troubles what they may.

But the prophecy looks beyond this ; it looks to the time when the remnant shall dwell secure in the heavenly Jerusalem, where all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

What a glorious prospect ! Shall I think any term of waiting too long and tedious that is to have so bright an ending ?

Let me strive to cultivate the spirit of patience. If tempests of trouble and conflict rage around, I must remember that in quietness and confidence shall be my strength, and look forward to the day when the Lord Himself shall be "for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the residue of His people ¹."

Happy for me if, when the trial time is over, I can say with the afflicted Psalmist: "I waited patiently for the Lord: and He inclined unto me,

¹ Isaiah xxviii. 5.

and heard my calling. He brought me out of the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay: and set my feet upon a rock, and ordered my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth: even a thanksgiving unto our God¹."

That it may be so, O holy Father, I commend myself unreservedly to Thy keeping.

"O Lord, my God, do Thou Thy holy will,
I will be still,
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm,
And break the charm,
Which lulls me clinging to my Father's breast
In perfect rest²."

¹ Psalm xl. 1-3.

² The Christian Year.

Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday.

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.”—*Heb. xii. 1, 2.*

IN the Collect for last Sunday we spoke of the race set before us, the race, that is, which begins with our birth and ends with our death; which lasts through the whole earthly life, and has for its goal the fadeless life in Heaven. We spoke of the hindrances which sorely try us in our course, and implored God to have pity on our weakness, to raise up His power and come among us, and with great might to succour us, that His bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us.

This is powerful, earnest pleading, fit for the lips of those who see their own insufficiency for the aim which they have in view.

Now let me devote a few minutes to-day to thinking over the final stage of this most momentous of all races. I have already gone

through a considerable portion of the ground, my race is partly run, but I cannot tell *how* much of the ground yet remains to be covered. It matters not, however; I know as much as this, that my running must be with patience. I must go steadily on, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and never stumble on the way. But how can I manage this? If there *are* lets and hindrances, how shall I avoid them? Only by looking unto Jesus. He has run the same race and won the goal; they who would also win must look to Him, that they may learn so to run as to obtain.

“God hath sent a Man before thee,
Faint not, fear not, Christian soul;
One hath run the race thou runnest,
One for thee hath won the goal¹.”

On the first Christmas Day in the lowly manger Christ Jesus commenced His earthly race; and on the Cross at Calvary He won His crown.

And how will it be with me when my appointed time is come? When the approach of death

¹ *Legenda Monastica.*

warns me that my race is nearly over, shall I be assured that the victory is mine? My death may be slow or sudden, long looked-for or unexpected, these are matters of little moment. The all-important question is, Will it find me well prepared? At the instant the warning comes, shall I have attained the goal? or shall I be lingering on the race-course of this lower world, unable to detach my affections from it?

Death! let me think for once of the final snapping asunder of the cords which keep body and soul together; it is an awful moment, full of solemnity even to the holiest among us. *Now* to be dwelling in this world of sin, whether among the gay and light-hearted or among the sad and dreary; and *then* in one instant, in the twinkling of an eye, to be in the land of spirits whence none can return, our probation over, our final reckoning with the Judge the very next thing on our programme. What if, when our death-call sounds, we have to look back upon unrepented sins? What if we be taken in the very act of sinning, in deed, or word, or thought? Surely it were better to cast away every hind-

rance, even to the cherished idol of our hearts than find ourselves short of the mark when the knell tolls out.

Why should not *I* begin this very day to lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset me, and to run with patience and steady perseverance? for I know not if I may live to see to-morrow's sun. And if I do, the added weight of to-day's sin will impede to-morrow's progress.

O merciful Jesu, Who hast trodden the way before, and Who biddest us to follow in Thy steps, grant me Thy grace ever to fix my earnest gaze on Thee; that in life I may be constant, and in death triumphant for Thy wondrous merit's sake.

“O! by Thy power, grant, Lord, that we
At our last hour fall not from Thee;
Saved by Thy grace, Thine may we be,
All through the days of eternity.”

Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday.

"They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut."—*S. Matt.* xxv. 10.

IN the course of these meditations we have considered again and again the future condition of those who accept the offer of salvation, the joy and glory of the redeemed in that day when the Lord will be their "diadem of beauty," the triumphant song which will gladden their hearts and of which they will sing the bright refrain, the "feast of fat things" with which they will be satisfied, the perfection of unity which they will enjoy through all eternity with God Himself and His elect. All these things have given us themes for reflection. To-day we must face a different picture, and endeavour to see how it will fare with those who from indifference, sloth or worldliness, neglect so great salvation.

The Marriage-supper of the Lamb, this is the drawing on our canvas. And we hear a command

proceeding from the Throne of the King of kings "Praise Our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great¹." Then a burst of voices issues from a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and of mighty thunders, saying, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the Marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready²." And then, but not till the elect are safely placed, "the door is shut."

A closed door! Let us think for a few seconds what this expression implies. Imagine the vexation of an invited guest, who has travelled a long way to be present at a wedding or any other ceremonial, finding himself shut out because already the proceedings have commenced. Imagine the far greater disappointment of a houseless wanderer, seeking a promised home of exceeding beauty and comfort, and reaching it just too late for admission. Think what must be the agony of suspense as, nearing the palace, he hears already the voices of those who have

¹ Rev. xix. 5.

² xix. 6, 7

found a home before him. And then the awful blow as, just before reaching it, he sees the door shut against him, and finds that he is thrown back upon a life of endless despair. What would he not give if he might begin his journey over again, when he would march on steadily, never casting a wistful glance on the things that are left behind, but pressing forward towards the mark for the prize which he now so eagerly covets?

Such desolation will be the lot of those who neglect to make ready for the appearance of the Bridegroom. Death may call any one of us away while we are still clinging to the things of earth, unmindful of our higher calling; and that one will stand *without* the golden gate, vainly pleading for admission. The tenderness of the Shepherd will give place before the just anger of the Judge, for it is written: "Because I have called, and ye have refused . . . I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh . . . But whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil¹."

¹ Prov. i. 24, 26, 33.

In the Book of the Revelation of S. John¹, we read of the Son of Man as the possessor of "the key of David;" it is "He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." If reference is here made in the first instance to admission into the Church Militant by Christ, its Divine Head, it may pass by an easy and warrantable transition to the power of Christ, the keeper of the heavenly treasury, over the door of the New Jerusalem. "When Thou (O Christ) hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers." Thou hast set before us an open door, and no man can shut it². If we will to enter in and stand in our lot in the Heavenly City, there is none to hinder us. Principalities and powers can have no force at all to bar our free admission, since Thou art standing at the open door waiting to receive us.

Grant us Thy help, good Lord, that we may make our entrance sure, before the day of grace be past and over.

¹ Rev. iii. 7.

² iii. 8.

Thursday after the Fourth Sunday.

“A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”—*Isaiah xxxii. 2.*

WHATEVER may be the primary meaning of this passage, there is no doubt that it applies in its highest sense to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. The Prophet designed to show that though tyranny, oppression, and wrong might make havoc among the peoples of the earth, yet the Son of God, when He came down in human form, would humble Himself to bear all infirmities and to sympathize with all sorrows ; that His advent as “Perfect man” would be a cause of rejoicing, not for the proud and arrogant, not for the oppressor and the worldling, but for the troubled, the care-worn, the oppressed.

There is an accumulation of appropriate similes in this one verse, “A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind.” We know but little in

our own land of the terrible destruction wrought by boisterous winds; but we hear of it in tropical climates, when forests are uprooted and whole villages swept away. What would not anyone give at such a time for a hiding-place, in which he might be safe from the wind; a covert in which he might be sheltered from the tempest? Just such a refuge is the Saviour for all who put themselves trustfully under His care.

Again, "A man shall be as rivers of water in a dry place." In a desert or tropical land, where at times both animal and vegetable life are so blighted that they are ready to perish, what would be the joy of suddenly hearing that rivers of water were henceforth to pass through, fertilizing the soil and satisfying the cravings of man and beast?

And now we come to the last simile—"the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." We cannot appreciate this figure in our temperate climate as they could who dwell in the Tropics; yet we do know what it is to toil on a sultry summer's day, whether labouring with our hands under the sun's scorching rays, or marching along

a dusty road without one foot of shelter. Oh! the relief if, when almost too weary to take another step, we behold a great rock, under whose refreshing shadow we may rest awhile. Now just such a rock have we for the comfort and refreshment of our spiritual life, and *our* Rock is Christ¹. With Him we may find shelter from the heat and glare of temptation or persecution. Out of His wounded side flow rivers of living water, so that our spiritual thirst may be quenched. Oh!

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.”

Now, we often hear it said that Christmas is a sad time for souls in suffering and sorrow. We compassionate mourners fresh from their bereavement because the merrymaking and rejoicings from which they cannot wholly keep aloof seem incongruous with their grief, and wound their sensitive spirits. But a little calm reflection would turn their heaviness into joy, enabling

¹ See 1 Cor. x. 4.

them to bear with the festivities for the sake of the central historic fact round which they cluster.

What more soothing to Christian mourners than the advent among them of the Man of Sorrows? or to those on whom the blow of poverty has fallen with a dead, dull weight than the visit of "a Brother born to adversity;" or to those who are objects of calumny and persecution than the coming of One "despised and rejected¹," "a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people²."

Surely it is for the sorrowful and the troubled that Christmas has especial consolations. It is cheering to hear that to us is born a Saviour, a Friend, a Comforter; One Who, by reason of His perfect humanity, can feel for our woes, as, by reason of His perfect Godhead, He can relieve them.

Oh! may I never be so mistaken as to nurse my sorrows at Christmastide, when I might be applying a precious balm to heal them! or so selfish as to refuse my meed of praise to the Babe of Bethlehem when the very angels quitted Heaven to sing a carol in honour of His birth!

¹ Isaiah liii. 3.

² Ps. xxii. 6.

Friday after the Fourth Sunday.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek.”—*Isaiah* lxi. 1.

THIS sixty-first chapter of *Isaiah* is prophetic of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He it is who is supposed to be speaking thus: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek.” This reminds us of the eleventh chapter, in which it said of the branch of Jesse, “the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him;”¹ and it carries us forward to the historic narrative, in which we read that at the baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him; and, lo! a voice from Heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased”².

¹ *Isaiah* xi. 2.

² *S. Matt.* iii. 16, 17.

This great commission, given publicly to the Son of Man at the opening of His ministry, was testified to by John the Baptist, who said: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God ¹."

Now, let us see for what great work the Christ was set apart or consecrated. Here are His own words—"The Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek."

This is our stand-point for to-day. We want to realise that it is *the meek* who will benefit by the Gospel of salvation; not the proud and self-sufficient Pharisee, but the lowly Publican who, conscious of his sinfulness, humbles himself to the dust, and repents. Humility is at the root of all spiritual life and growth. It is only by a conviction of personal unworthiness that we may hope *to be accounted worthy* of eternal life. Has this Advent made us, has it made *me* more deeply conscious of sins which have been smouldering within, and more anxious to cleanse the heart and life? Meekness and humility, to be

¹ S. John i. 32, 34.

real, must not shrink from the exposure of faults, if *so only* they can be rooted out, or even from their chastisement; for sometimes it is through the agency of a slanderer or a scoffer that we must be wrought upon for our ultimate good.

Many a man, endowed with almost every good moral quality, lacks the spirit of humility, which alone can make him a devout recipient of the salvation wrought by Christ. Physical and moral courage, trust in God's Providence, truthfulness, perseverance and kindness—all these may combine to make an attractive character, but it is to the *meek* that Jesus loves to preach the good tidings of His salvation; to the humble, who in deep abasement bewail their shortcomings, and without one spark of jealousy can see others preferred before them.

Christmas will be nothing to me unless I realise my need of pardon and grace, but this I will strive to do during the short time that remains. Each Person of the Holy Trinity has been engaged in the scheme of my redemption. The Father spared not His Son; the Son freely gave Himself, the Holy Spirit anointed Him

and now carries on His work of atonement. O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, how shall I respond to Thy yearning care for me? It is written of those that fear the Lord—"They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels¹." Thy Spirit yearns for me, O God; Thou wouldest have me for Thy "peculiar treasure." And shall I disappoint Thee? Oh! no, not if Thy grace will work with me here and now, cutting and polishing me, by whatsoever means, even as the precious stones are polished in the hands of the lapidary.

I yield myself to Thee, my God. Oh! that I might hear from Thy gracious lips the word of promise: "Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of Thy God²."

¹ Malachi iii. 17.

² Isaiah lxii. 3.

Christmas Eve.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word : that they all may be one ; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in Us : that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.”—*S. John* xvii. 20, 21.

WE have been striving through the last four weeks to gain some little notion of the greatness of Christ's self-sacrifice as seen in His incarnation and birth. On this day, the eve of His nativity, we will carry our thoughts onward to the close of His earthly life, and consider the prayer which He addressed to His Father on behalf of those whom He had come to redeem.

He had gathered together a little band of followers to whom He had manifested His Father's name, and pointed out the way of salvation ; and, before returning to His throne above, He commended them to that Father's care, beseeching Him to preserve them in truth and unity, and finally to give them everlasting life.

And it was not for these alone that Jesus

interceded, but for all who should believe in Him through their word ; for His own elect in all subsequent generations. He saw far into the vista of ages, right onward to the end ; and for all of us, who should become His servants and children, His heart's desire and prayer was that we should be one ; one in the Father and the Son, through the fellowship of the blessed Spirit.

And shall this prayer of our gracious Lord remain unanswered for want of our cooperation ? In a former meditation we thought over the subject of corporate union, the outward unity of the Christian Church. To-day we will give our minds to the oneness of spirit implied in the comprehensive term—*Love*.

“That they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.” If we have love one towards another we witness for the Christ Whom we serve, even as the early Christians witnessed for Him, thereby drawing outsiders into His fold. We claim to be members of Christ, co-heirs with Him of eternal life. Is there that bond of union among us which ought always to unite the members of one family ?

Christian fellowship seems acknowledged on all hands as the reasonable outcome of our recognition of the Saviour's nativity; for His birthday is everywhere made the occasion, the one annual occasion of social meetings, enlarged almsgiving, the healing of feuds, and a certain breaking down of class barriers.

But it becomes a question if there be anything more than custom in all these things? Are these acts of goodwill only on the surface, or are they the indications of a real mutual love among the brethren? We cannot and need not judge of one another, but let me sift my own motives, for it is a matter not of temporary but of eternal moment. Have I, deep down in my heart of hearts, a sincere love for all who are Christ's? Be they enemies, or be they friends, it behoves me to keep a place for them in my sympathies. Differences of opinion and sentiment and taste may exist in any family, but these things should never create dissension or coldness. If I regard all Christians as my brethren in Christ, I shall bear with their follies and discourtesies and unkindnesses, I shall respect their scruples, shall

avoid offending or injuring them; shall rejoice in their joys, and feel for all their woes.

What a blissful community would that be in which such harmony existed! Shall we not strive to bring about such a state of things from this time forward? Shall we not pray that this year's commemoration of our Lord's Nativity may be, in very truth, the inauguration of a reign of peace and goodwill?

Ah! yes; when I make my Christmas Communion, my heart shall echo the Saviour's prayer, that we all may be one even as the Father and the Son are one. Then, when we have been "made perfect in one," the dear Lord, Who left His Throne for love of us, "shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied ¹."

¹ Isaiah liii. 11.

h -

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Publications on THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE.

BOOKS.

Price.

Natural Theology of Natural Beauty (The). s. d.
By the Rev. E. St. John Tyrwhitt, M.A. Post 8vo. 1 6
Cloth boards 1 6

Steps to Faith.

Addresses on some points in the Controversy with Unbelief.
By the Rev. Brownlow Maitland, M.A. Post 8vo. 1 6
Cloth boards 1 6

Scepticism and Faith.

By the Rev. Brownlow Maitland. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 4

Theism or Agnosticism.

An Essay on the grounds of Belief in God. By the Rev.
Brownlow Maitland, M.A. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6

Argument from Prophecy (The).

By the Rev. Brownlow Maitland, M.A., Author of
"Scepticism and Faith," &c. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6

Being of God, Six Addresses on the.

By C. J. Ellicott, D.D., Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol.
Small Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6

Modern Unbelief: its Principles and Charac-

TERISTICS. By the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Gloucester
and Bristol. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6

Some Modern Religious Difficulties.

Six Sermons preached, by the request of the Christian
Evidence Society, at St. James's, Piccadilly, on Sunday
Afternoons after Easter, 1876; with a Preface by his Grace
the late Archbishop of Canterbury. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6

Some Witnesses for the Faith.

Six Sermons preached, by the request of the Christian
Evidence Society, at St. Stephen's Church, South Kensing-
ton, on Sunday Afternoons after Easter, 1877. Post 8vo. 1 4
Cloth boards 1 4

Theism and Christianity.

Six Sermons preached, by the request of the Christian
Evidence Society, at St. James's, Piccadilly, on Sunday
Afternoons after Easter, 1878. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6
[Small Post 8vo.]

1-3-84.]

<i>When was the Pentateuch Written ?</i>	Price.
	s. d.
By George Warrington, B.A., Author of "Can we Believe in Miracles ?" &c. Post 8vo.....	Cloth boards 1 6

The Analogy of Religion.

Dialogues founded upon Butler's "Analogy of Religion."
By the late Rev. H. R. Huckin, D.D., Head Master of Repton School. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 3 0

"Miracles."

By the Rev. E. A. Litton, M.A., Examining Chaplain of the Bishop of Durham. Crown 8vo. Cloth boards 1 6

Moral Difficulties connected with the Bible.

Being the Boyle Lectures for 1871. By the Ven. Archdeacon Hessey, D.C.L. Preacher to the Hon. Society of Gray's Inn, &c. FIRST SERIES. Post 8vo. ... Cloth boards 1 6

Moral Difficulties connected with the Bible.

Being the Boyle Lectures for 1872. By the Ven. Archdeacon Hessey, D.C.L. SECOND SERIES. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 2 6

Prayer and recent Difficulties about it.

The Boyle Lectures for 1873, being the THIRD SERIES of "Moral Difficulties connected with the Bible."
By the Ven. Archdeacon Hessey, D.C.L. Post 8vo. Cloth boards 2 6
The above Three Series in a volume Cloth boards 6 0

Historical Illustrations of the Old Testament.

By the Rev. G. Rawlinson, M.A., Camden Professor of Ancient History, Oxford. Post 8vo Cloth boards 1 6

Can we Believe in Miracles ?

By G. Warrington, B.A., of Caius College, Cambridge. Post 8vo..... Cloth boards 1 6

The Moral Teaching of the New Testament

VIEWS AS EVIDENTIAL TO ITS HISTORICAL TRUTH. By the Rev. C. A. Row, M.A. Post 8vo..... Cloth boards 1 9

Scripture Doctrine of Creation.

By the Rev. T. R. Birks, M.A., Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge. Post 8vo..... Cloth boards 1 6

	Price.
	s. d.
<i>The Witness of the Heart to Christ.</i>	
Being the Hulsean Lectures for 1878. By the Rev. W. Boyd Carpenter, M.A. Post 8vo.Cloth boards	1 6
<i>Thoughts on the First Principles of the Positive</i>	
PHILOSOPHY, CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE HUMAN MIND. By the late Benjamin Shaw, M.A., late Fellow of Trinity College, Camb. Post 8vo.Limp cloth	0 8
<i>Thoughts on the Bible.</i>	
By the late Rev. W. Gresley, M.A., Prebendary of Lichfield. Post 8vo.Cloth boards	1 6
<i>The Reasonableness of Prayer.</i>	
By the Rev. P. Onslow, M.A. Post 8vo.Paper cover	0 8
<i>Paley's Evidences of Christianity.</i>	
A New Edition, with Notes, Appendix, and Preface. By the Rev. E. A. Litton, M.A. Post 8vo.....Cloth boards	4 0
<i>Paley's Natural Theology.</i>	
Revised to harmonize with Modern Science. By Mr. F. le Gros Clark, F.R.S., President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, &c. Post 8vo.Cloth boards	4 0
<i>Paley's Horæ Paulinæ.</i>	
A new Edition, with Notes, Appendix, and Preface. By J. S. Howson, D.D., Dean of Chester. Post 8vo. Cloth boards	3 0
<i>Religion and Morality.</i>	
By the Rev. Richard T. Smith, B.D., Canon of St. Patrick's, Dublin. Post 8vo.Cloth boards	1 6
<i>The Story of Creation as told by Theology</i>	
AND SCIENCE. By the Rev. T. S. Ackland, M.A. Post 8vo.Cloth boards	1 6
<i>Man's Accountableness for his Religious Belief.</i>	
A Lecture delivered at the Hall of Science, on Tuesday, April 2nd, 1872. By the Rev. Daniel Moore, M.A., Holy Trinity, Paddington. Post 8vo.Paper cover	0 3
<i>The Theory of Prayer; with Special Reference</i>	
TO MODERN THOUGHT. By the Rev. W. H. Karlake, M.A., Assistant Preacher at Lincoln's Inn, Vicar of Westcott, Dorking. Post 8vo.Limp cloth	1 0
<i>The Credibility of Mysteries.</i>	
A Lecture delivered at St. George's Hall, Langham Place. By the Rev. Daniel Moore, M.A. Post 8vo.....Paper cover	0 3

4. *Publications on the Christian Evidence.*

	Price. s. d.
<i>The Gospels of the New Testament: their</i> GENUINENESS AND AUTHORITY. By the Rev. R. J. Crosthwaite, M.A. Post 8vo..... <i>Paper cover</i>	0 3
<i>Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed,</i> TO THE CONSTITUTION AND COURSE OF NATURE: to which are added, Two Brief Dissertations. By Bishop Butler. NEW EDITION. Post 8vo..... <i>Cloth boards</i>	2 6
<i>Christian Evidences:</i> intended chiefly for the young. By the Most Reverend Richard Whately, D.D. 12mo..... <i>Paper cover</i>	0 4
<i>The Efficacy of Prayer.</i> By the Rev. W. H. Karslake, M.A., Assistant Preacher at Lincoln's Inn, &c. &c. Post 8vo. <i>Limp cloth</i>	0 6
<i>Science and the Bible: a Lecture by the Right</i> Rev. Bishop Perry, D.D. 18mo. <i>Paper cover</i> 4d., or <i>Limp cloth</i>	0 6
<i>A Lecture on the Bible. By the Very Rev.</i> E. M. Goulburn, D.D., Dean of Norwich. 18mo. <i>Paper cover</i>	0 2
<i>The Bible: Its Evidences, Characteristics, and</i> EFFECTS. A Lecture by the Right Rev. Bishop Perry, D.D. 18mo..... <i>Paper cover</i>	0 4
<i>The Origin of the World according to</i> REVELATION AND SCIENCE. A Lecture by Harvey Goodwin, M.A., Bishop of Carlisle. Post 8vo.... <i>Cloth boards</i>	0 4
<i>On the Origin of the Laws of Nature.</i> By Sir Edmund Beckett, Bart. Post 8vo..... <i>Cloth boards</i>	1 6
<i>What Is Natural Theology?</i> Being the Boyle Lectures for 1876. By the Rev. Alfred Barry, D.D., Bishop of Sydney. Post 8vo..... <i>Cloth boards</i>	2 6

* * For List of TRACTS on the Christian Evidences, see the Society's
Catalogue B.

LONDON:

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, CHARING CROSS, W.C.;
43, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, E.C.;
26, ST. GEORGE'S PLACE, HYDE PARK CORNER, S.W.
BRIGHTON: 135, NORTH STREET.

